

ALGERIA

Part 1

Algeria is a multiparty republic of approximately 33 million inhabitants. The head of state is elected by popular vote to a five-year term. President Bouteflika was reelected in 2004 to a second five-year term in a relatively transparent, contested election. Multiparty parliamentary elections in May 2007 were conducted in a generally transparent manner, although not all political parties were allowed full access to the electoral process. Multiparty local elections were held in November 2007, but the electoral process was marred by irregularities and charges of fraud. A state of emergency imposed in 1992 remains in force. Since the 1990s the human rights situation has improved significantly, although major concerns remain, including restrictions on political party activity limiting the right of citizens to change the government peacefully; restrictions on civil liberties, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association; limitations on religious freedom, including increased regulation of non-Muslim worship; corruption and a lack of government transparency; and discrimination against women.

Part 2

U.S. human rights and democracy goals include the realization of a democratic, transparent, and accountable political system with full respect for the rule of law. The United States seeks to accomplish these goals through targeted programs, technical assistance, and sustained diplomatic engagement. The United States promotes democratic principles, practices, values and human rights with government officials, members of political parties, civil society, and the media at every opportunity. The United States promotes reform of public institutions and governing practices, as well as increased participation by civil society in the political process. Efforts focus on three primary areas: a fair and transparent political process, an improved legal framework to facilitate the work of NGOs, and the decriminalization of defamation.

Part 3

U.S. officials routinely meet with democracy activists, political parties, journalists, members of civil society, and government officials to underscore consistently the U.S. commitment to freedom, the ability of the individual to be an

agent of change, and the value of a democratic form of government. Both publicly and privately, U.S. officials speak to individuals, groups, and the media about the importance of individual citizen participation in the political process. Several U.S.-funded programs address freedom of expression, democratic participation, and judicial independence.

In order to strengthen legislative institutions, a U.S.-funded program provides the parliament's members and staff with training in the budgetary process, drafting legislation, information technology, and media relations. The program, which also sponsors seminars by expert guest speakers and study tours of U.S. capitals, has been well received by parliament and is providing the legislative branch with new perspectives on oversight of the executive branch. Other programs promote reform and independence of the judiciary and help strengthen the overall legal environment. Through training for judges, lawyers, and magistrates and support for the establishment of a code of ethics for jurists, a U.S. implementing partner is promoting judicial independence, anticorruption efforts, greater adherence to the rule of law, and overall good governance. Another U.S.-funded program, set to begin in 2008, will focus on training female lawyers. From the economic side of these issues, another U.S. program aims to bolster the business environment by training judges and supporting other efforts to increase transparency.

The U.S. government also utilizes public diplomacy resources to support the development of youth as civic and political leaders through English language education, tailored exchange programs that expose local students to democratic principles and values, and civic education programs. The United States sponsors International Visitor Leadership Programs that cover subjects such as democracy, press freedom, and women's rights.

Part 4

U.S. officials routinely meet with human rights organizations, journalists, and members of civil society to discuss issues related to freedom of expression. The United States publicly and repeatedly underscores the importance of a free press to a democratic society. The embassy attends trials of journalists accused of criminal defamation, on occasion being the only representatives of the foreign diplomatic community present. To support press freedom, a U.S.-funded program trains journalists on responsible practices and reporting techniques. Another ongoing U.S.-funded program provides business training to

independent newspapers to make them more stable financially and able to participate in political discussion. The U.S. government supports the decriminalization of defamation, including through ongoing meetings with local representatives of local and international organizations working toward press freedom and support for an event that will focus on the decriminalization of defamation.

The U.S. government supports human rights activists and organizations and the vital role they play in serving as advocates for individual rights. A U.S.-funded program that concluded in January 2008 focused on the National Reconciliation Plan and worked to build the capacity of civil society, including the media, by providing training and facilitating networking and information sharing among local NGOs. The project succeeded in publishing a manual on professional journalism for local journalists, specifically focusing on raising awareness of journalists' legal rights. The program also succeeded in providing training and equipment to local human rights defenders to document human rights abuses accurately.

U.S. officials also meet with representatives of labor unions; persons with disabilities; and religious and women's groups, including organizations representing the country's religious minorities. To support women's empowerment, a small grant is helping to develop female leaders in their communities. The embassy engages with local government officials on combating trafficking in persons and meets regularly with NGOs to advance this issue. In addition, training and education for the military seeks to foster greater respect for the principle of civilian control of the military and includes human rights training components.